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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

*Memorandum*



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600  
19 September 1966

State Department review  
completed

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL  
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HIGHLIGHTS

The moderate chairman of the Buddhist Institute, Thich Tam Chau, is once again attempting to resume effective leadership of that group. Latest developments in the North Vietnamese POL situation continue to indicate that adequate stocks of some POL products are available or are being delivered.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: Contact between American and Communist troops was reported again today as Operation PRAIRIE continues in Quang Tri Province (Paras. 1-2). Operation DECK-HOUSE IV ends but the Marines involved have been incorporated into Operation PRAIRIE (Para. 3). US soldiers participating in Operation DANBURY in Binh Duong Province reported seizing nearly 60 tons of rice and 1,500 pounds of salt (Para. 4). A South Vietnamese civilian claims Viet Cong guerrillas shot 14 civilians held prisoner in a hut after a US helicopter flew over (Para. 5).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: Moderate chairman Tam Chau has begun attempts to resume effective leadership of the Buddhist Institute (Paras. 1-2). Chau plans to refuse an expected offer by National Police Director Loan to set up a new national Buddhist Organization (Para. 3). American observers suspect that a recent leaflet attacking Tam Chau for collaborating with the government was sponsored by the government in order to exacerbate divisions within Buddhist ranks (Para. 4). National Police Director Loan recently told an American official that he will soon release one of two Frenchmen arrested for antigovernment activities on 6 September, and that he hopes to exert government influence in the constituent assembly by forming "study groups" for the delegates (Paras. 5-6).

III. North Vietnamese Military Developments: Two US aircraft were lost on 19 September, one in unusual circumstances (Paras. 1-2). There were a

number of MIG sightings and engagements over the

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IV. Other Communist Military Developments:  
There is nothing significant to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: The Viet  
Cong held a high-level military conference in early  
August, according to a Liberation News Agency broad-  
cast (Paras. 1-3).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Light contact between American and North Vietnamese forces has been reported again today as five battalions of US Marines continue to sweep the area of northernmost Quang Tri Province immediately adjacent to the Demilitarized Zone. Initial reports list three enemy soldiers killed in today's action. Heavy artillery fire and tactical air strikes have supported the units involved.

2. The marines participating in Operation PRAIRIE today reported finding 171 Communist bodies in the area where heavy fighting took place over the weekend. The enemy casualty toll now stands at 468 killed and three captured since this operation began on 3 August.

3. The US Marine battalion landing team participating in Operation DECK HOUSE IV was incorporated into US Operation PRAIRIE as the ground portion of Operation DECK HOUSE IV ended yesterday. A total of 17 Americans were killed and 84 wounded in this operation which began on 14 September. Communist losses included 83 killed and ten suspects captured.

4. US Army units participating in search-and-destroy Operation DANBURY in Binh Duong Province reported finding a Viet Cong supply area. Included among the material seized were 59 tons of rice, 1,500 pounds of salt, and 50 bags of cement. Cumulative casualties since this operation began on 15 September now stand at one American killed and nine wounded.

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Viet Cong Atrocities

5. Yesterday, South Vietnamese soldiers found a wounded civilian about seven miles southwest of Vinh Long town in the delta province of Vinh Long. The civilian reported that he was one of 13 civilian prisoners gunned down by Viet Cong guerrillas and thrown into a canal when allied helicopters made a reconnaissance pass over the hut in which they were held. Also, in the same general area yesterday, South Vietnamese forces discovered four civilians chained together--two were dead and the other two wounded. One of the wounded claimed that when helicopters made a low pass over their position, Viet Cong guerrillas mowed down the civilians with small-arms fire.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAMBuddhist Developments

1. Moderate chairman Thich Tam Chau has begun attempts to resume effective leadership of the Buddhist Institute. Today, a communiqué issued under his aegis set forth the church's new policy. Among other points, the communiqué declared that negotiations with the government would be resumed, and that the Buddhist "struggle" movement was officially suspended pending the decision of a special congress of the Unified Buddhist Association to be held sometime in the future. The church's official participation in Catholic Father Hoang Quynh's antigovernment movement, the Citizens' Front For All Religions, was also withdrawn in the communiqué.

2. As yet, there has been no immediate response from members of the Institute council, which has been dominated by militant monks responsive to Tri Quang. It remains to be seen whether Tam Chau's declaration will be tolerated by this group.

3. Tam Chau expects the National Police director, General Loan, to approach him soon with an offer of government support for a new national Buddhist organization to rival the present Unified Buddhist Association

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Although Chau plans to refuse Loan's offer, Thich Tam Giac, head of the Buddhist chaplain's organization, reportedly has indicated his willingness to cooperate with the government in establishing such an organization. Loan himself recently told an American observer that he had assured Tam Chau that he would support any project Chau desired. However, he also indicated that he preferred to work with Thich Tam Giac.

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4. On 17 September, a leaflet attacking Tam Chau for collaborating with the government was distributed at the Buddhist Institute's temporary headquarters in Saigon. The sponsorship of the document is unknown, but American observers have commented that it undoubtedly represents another black propaganda effort by the government to exacerbate divisions within Buddhist ranks.

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Government Plans

5. National Police Director Loan recently told an American observer that he will soon release M. Philippe Grandjean, one of two Frenchmen arrested on 6 September on suspicion of financing antigovernment political groups. He stated that Grandjean had given money to the Buddhist Institute some time ago, and should have been arrested well before the election.

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6. Regarding the constituent assembly, Loan said that he hoped to form "study groups" for the delegates in order to influence their attitudes, thereby winning control of between 60 and 65 per cent of the assembly.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. A US Air Force F-105D was downed by ground fire 57 miles northeast of Hanoi on 19 September after an air strike which destroyed the Cao Nung highway bridge by a direct hit. Rescue efforts were not initiated due to the location of the downed aircraft.

2. Preliminary reports from the carrier USS Coral Sea indicate that a Navy F-4B may have been downed by an unusual type of fire while performing a waterway reconnaissance mission 12 miles south of Thanh Hoa. The missing pilot's wingman reported seeing "a single rocket which did not appear to be a SAM" rising to a height of 10,000 feet shortly before he lost communications with the downed F-4B. Despite the wingman's observation, the SA-2 surface-to-air missile would appear to be the hostile weapons system involved based on the altitude and location of the incident. There are 21 SA-2 sites in the Thanh Hoa area, several of which were within firing range of the downed aircraft.

3. There were no MIG incidents or sightings reported by US pilots flying over North Vietnam on 19 September. During the preceding three days US airmen had reported seeing as many as 31 MIG fighters in eight encounters northeast of Hanoi. Missile or gun fire was exchanged in five of these incidents and one plane was lost by each side.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. The Viet Cong held a high-level military conference in early August, according to a 16 September Liberation Radio broadcast. The conference, only the second of its kind ever called by the Viet Cong, was a briefing session and a general exchange of views on the current military situation for military representatives from Viet Cong units throughout all of South Vietnam. The first such conference was held in October of 1962, according to the broadcast.

2. The August 1966 conference was chaired by the deputy political commissar of the Liberation Army, and the highest ranking speaker referred to was a deputy military commander. Neither of these individuals was identified by name but captured documents and prisoners of war have identified these men as North Vietnamese generals Tran Do and Tran Van Tra.

3. Although the broadcast was essentially a morale building propaganda item picturing the delegates returning to battle stations with new military knowledge and renewed political enthusiasm, the language of the broadcast strongly implied that the discussions had included significant expressions of differences of opinion and lectures on inadequate military performance in 1965-66. No specific problems were identified but the delegates were described as "confused" by directives from above and were "criticized" for their weak points. At least one purpose of the conference was apparently to explain leadership intentions to key field commanders and to assure them that the leadership remains unshaken in its determination to continue the fighting.

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